1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
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has his own speciality, his own expert knowledge, his cures, and his special field. No wonder, then, that the Bida barbers are not of equal standing: there are famous 'celebrities', and there are also the smaller fry. The public is aware of these distinctions. It is well aware also of the special field of certain foreign barber-doctors who frequently come to Bida to practise. Thus, for example, it is generally known that the operation of removing the uvula of children—an operation said to help growth and secure better nourishment—is performed only by Hausa barbers. The more surprising, then, is the fact that this array of specialists and special cures is not equally accessible to every citizen of Bida or Nupe.[1] For the barbers are organized in three independent guilds, one in each *ekpã* of the town. Neither doctors nor patients ever ignore these boundaries. Each guild, or guild section, is under its own titled head, who as a rule has also a 'second-in-command' (who is 'heir designate' to the guild-headship at the same time) to assist him in guild work. In the *Etsu* Umaru quarter guild-head and 'second-in-command' are called *Ndeji* and *Ndabaki*; in the *Etsu* Usman quarter *Tsadzo* and *Ndamaraki*; in the *Etsu* Masaba quarter we find only one guild rank, who is the present head of the guild at large, the *Sokyara*. This highest guild office is taken in rotation by the three guild sections.

The Bida barbers, busy and prosperous, do not practise farming in addition to their main occupation; nor do sons of barbers ever follow any other profession. On the contrary, men of other professions may become barbers. I have recorded three recent cases: two were adults, one a farmer and the other a (Fulani) herdsman; the third was a young man, the son of a straw-hat maker; the two adults settled later as barbers in villages; the young man, who came from Bida, remained there to practise his craft. To learn the barbers' craft proper does not take long: the apprentice works only a year under a master (without changing his habitation). The master, during this time, pockets the larger part of the apprentice's earnings. The apprentice himself buys the instruments of his new trade—a collection of old-fashioned razors, costing about 4*s.* to 5*s.* But to learn the medical side of the craft requires (I was told) a five-years' apprenticeship. One of the two men just mentioned had done this, and is to-day a practising 'doctor'. Let me add that neither the 'trade secrets' of the barber-doctors nor the training in the craft involve any magical or religious conception and form of procedure. It is purely a craft technique.

The special cures and forms of treatment are secrets of individual barber families. They are handed on from generation to generation and are the common property of all adults in a family (though not of the

[1] Nupe society also possesses a certain group of 'doctors', or, more precisely, 'medicine-men'—*cigbecíši* (*cigbe* means 'medicine')—whose craft is based on magical ideas and is closely linked with divining and the religious system of the country. I cannot describe here their organization more fully. I will only say that they practise mostly in the pagan districts, and that they are united in a loose 'order', acknowledging a common head, the *Etsu Cigbecíši* in Bida. To-day the modern conception of the barber-doctor is gaining ground also in the pagan villages. I found a significant effect of this transition in two Nupe villages—'medicine-men' and diviners who were practising barbers at the same time.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
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II

DIVINATION

787 WE shall deal with two methods of divination, both of which are known throughout the country and applied on all occasions, trivial as well as serious. The first, called *eba*, consists in throwing strings of shells and resembles in technique the *ifa* divination of Yoruba; the second, *hatí*, is of Mohammedan origin and involves drawing mystic patterns in the sand.[1] The two methods appeal to a somewhat different public, the former being practised mainly in the villages and pagan districts, the latter in the sophisticated capital, Bida. The division, however, is far from rigid; also, as we shall see, the two methods share certain essential features in spite of the difference in technique and religious background.

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Two other types of divination, which are used infrequently and mainly on minor matters, and which are known only in the river area, may be disregarded. One, called *evo* ('cowrie shells'), is a simplified version of the method of *eba*. The other, called *kpápagi* ('tortoise'), employs the dried, hollowed-out body of a tortoise, which is made to slide down a taut string. This is a crude oracle, permitting only three answers—'yes' (if the tortoise glides down quickly), 'no' (if it does not glide down at all), and 'doubtful' (if it glides down slowly).

1. THE MECHANICS OF EBA

787 The method of *eba* is far from uniform. Although the divining apparatus itself and the principles of interpretation are the same everywhere, the 'key' used by the diviner, his invocations, and his minor paraphernalia may differ from locality to locality, even from one person to the other. This scope for variety does not extend to the attitude assumed in the act of divining. The eight men I observed all went through their act in a serious and tense mood, their gestures and utterances from time to time rising to an excitement which lent to the proceedings a thoroughly dramatic atmo-

[1] The Nupe term *hatí* appears to be a corruption of the Arabic *hatim* 'seal', 'magic square'; cf. the corresponding Hausa term *hatimi*.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
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4. *Eba* diviner

5. *Hati* diviner

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sphere. One diviner, indeed, behaved in an almost hysterical manner. The clients in turn were shy, spoke little, and behaved in the presence of the diviner with the same visible restraint and, occasionally, awe which the Nupe bring to the esoteric part of a religious ceremony.

The diviner's apparatus includes two sets of objects, the divining strings themselves, and a series of marked slabs which serve as the 'key' for interpreting the throws. The former consist of eight cords of hemp, each strung through four perforated, hollow half-shells, placed equidistantly along the cord, about three inches from one another. The cords end in four strands, covered with small rings made of hollowed-out berries and cowrie shells; these cord-ends have no importance in the actual divining, being merely ornamental tassels, though it seems significant that they are again four (or eight) in number. The divination fastens upon the four half-shells, which are called *kpyekpya* and are made either of the shell of sheanut or of the kernel of the dompalm; in either case the bundle of eight cords is referred to as *vúnkpara*, 'white shell' (of sheanut). The diviner starts the proceedings by placing the eight cords on the ground, in parallel rows and pointing away from him, all shells being turned open side down. He then picks them up at the middle, two at a time, holding one in each hand, and throws them down again, once more in parallel rows. When this has been repeated four times, that is, when all the cords have been picked up and thrown, the diviner will interpret the pattern of shells as they happened to fall, open side up or closed side up. The procedure is called *sa 'ba*, 'to cast the *eba*', or for short, *esa*, 'the casting'. The diviner himself is known, accordingly, as *ebásaci*, 'One who casts the *eba*'.[1] The interpretation of the pattern thrown does not, however, consist merely in counting up the shells, but involves a more complicated calculation which requires certain aids to memory and a definite 'key'.

These are provided in the second set of objects, which is included in the generic name for the whole divining apparatus, *eba*. It consists of eight small, roughly square slabs cut from gourds, each of which bears a different series of point-like marks. The point-designs are known as *emi* or *kata*, that is, 'house', which nomenclature will become clear presently. The diviners employ two further paraphernalia, which play no part in the actual interpretation of the *eba*, a hippopotamus tooth, and a round or wedge-shaped stone about the size of a fist. Throughout the proceedings the diviner will poke the tooth or stone at the divining cords as though he wished to prod them into activity or to aid some process that

[1] The diviner is also called, by the Hausa name, *boka* or (the Nupe-ized version) *bocí*.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
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former case, too, it is sometimes considered advisable to make sure of a propitious day; but in the latter case divination may be the only means for discovering the appropriate religious remedy. Let me mention in passing the widespread conviction that even the Emir of Nupe consults diviners (of the Mohammedan variety), in large numbers and 'for whole weeks at a time', to aid him in his multifarious problems: which belief, in spite of its circumstantial nature, is unsupported by such evidence as I could muster.[1]

One more word about the frequency of the visits one pays the diviner. For the townspeople no rule can be laid down; persons who seek advice on trade, travels, promotion in rank or other specific questions will obviously consult the diviner *ad hoc*, whenever the need happens to arise. It is somewhat different in the villages, where people also go to the diviner simply to have their fortunes told. Here individuals would pay fairly regular visits, once or twice a month, or at least once in two or three months. I have, however, spoken to villagers who had not been to the diviner for as much as five or six months.

The diviner is paid a small fee every time he is consulted. The fee is neither rigidly laid down nor claimed in advance. In Bida, the diviner is usually paid in money, though a bowl of rice or a few kolanuts may be thrown in, the client paying according to his ability, between a penny and sixpence. In the village one mostly pays in food or kolanuts. The diviners themselves regard the payments as 'gifts', and would strongly deny that they are divining 'for money'. No diviner could in fact live on what his skill earns him; nor does a diviner's reputation add in any way to his status in this rank-conscious society. Divining is merely an additional vocation, prized for the mystic wisdom and power it implies rather than for material or social gains.

This brings me to the last point, the social position of the diviner himself. Divination is essentially 'learning'—a skill that can be acquired by anyone having a 'good head'; if it is hereditary in a family it is so only incidentally. A great many diviners learned the art, in their youth, from another expert, paying for the tuition. One Bida diviner, for example, a man of about sixty-five, had learned divination when he was fifteen, studying for ten months, 'every day as in school'. Another had learned the craft from a stranger he met on his wanderings when a young man. Two diviners made an exceptional and unorthodox claim; while admitting that they had to acquire the skill, they maintained that they had 'learned it from God', by inspiration as it were. The majority of the diviners I met were also farmers; one was a barber by

[1] According to tradition, the old kings of Nupe had numerous official diviners among their retinue; this practice has certainly disappeared.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
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profession; the diviner in Kutigi was the head of the small group of 'hunters' in that community; while the diviner in Jebba held a high rank among the village elders and the priestship of an important *kuti*. Several diviners are medicine experts at the same time, so that they can treat as well as diagnose illness; those who are not must send their clients to a 'doctor' for the appropriate *cigbe*, unless of course their diagnosis reveals the kind of illness which only sacrifices and similar observances can cure.

Being a learned 'skill', divination is irregularly distributed. Bida, not unnaturally, has a great many diviners (though the majority are Moslem sand-diviners), both in the town itself and in the farming settlements outside. Doko, a moderately large village, has three diviners; Kutigi, a much larger place, and Jebba, a busy thoroughfare on the river, have only one each. Some villages have no resident expert; here the people would go to diviners in the neighbourhood, the diviners themselves being apparently unwilling to go 'on tour'.

Every diviner, apart from advising clients, also divines for himself and his family, either when confronted with some particular problem or on regular days (for example, every Friday in Kutigi). Furthermore, before his first divination of the day, the diviner must go through a particular procedure which in a sense consecrates his tools. Without at first using the marked slabs, he will throw the cords as often as is necessary to obtain the full key series. As each shell pattern appears in its proper place he puts the corresponding slab on the ground. In due course, the *sokógba* is placed between the 4th and 5th slab, that is, beside the slab referring to the diviner's own 'house'. While proceeding with his throws, the diviner mutters a kind of running commentary, thus—'Figures of the *eba*, join each other. Are your words (or signs) sufficient? They are not sufficient. There are three *etsu*, now there are four *etsu* . . . I have not yet extracted *etsu* (number) three . . .' So it goes on until the series is complete. At this stage the diviner says—'*To, Sokó da bo*', 'Good, God is there', turns all cords with the open shell face down, and is ready to begin the real divining.

In no other way does the diviner stand under special rules, restrictions or observances, with two exceptions. If he happens to refresh himself with beer while divining, as he often does, he would pour a little on his slabs, saying that this is 'for God', while the normal practice is to pour a little beer on the ground for the *kuci* or 'grandfather'. Again, while the *efu* gifts to spirits made by ordinary people are harmless, the diviner's gift harbours great danger for any person who would first catch sight of it after it had been placed on the wayside. To avoid this danger, the diviner would place his *efu* underneath some large tree in the bush where

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
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people are unlikely to pass. These two rules, then, and the 'consecration' of the diviner's tools with its reference to the presence of God, demonstrate the mystic power that attaches to divining and to those who handle it, and the sacred provenance of the skill. As we have seen, however, this evidence of sacredness does not content every individual; so that some will also claim that their whole knowledge is divinely inspired or that their paraphernalia are gifts of God.

Whatever status the diviner will claim for himself, for his art he will always claim the perfection of a well thought-out system, governed by rigorous, consistent rules, even though he must resort to far-fetched arguments to prove his case. Let us consider this point for a moment. The diviners clearly represent a selected group of individuals, not a random sample; for only those with particular leanings and aptitudes—those with a 'good head'—will choose this profession. Now, comparing the manner in which the Nupe generally are apt to discuss religious topics with the attitude shown by the diviners in their field, we find that one of the variants of the former constitutes the norm of the latter. The layman discussing religion may or may not be inclined to embark upon speculation: the diviner discussing divination does so as a matter of course if by this means he can force his facts into a more convincing order. Equally, in the act of divining, he is capable of a tense and dramatic mood. The first attitude only satisfies the diviner's own leanings; for his public takes no interest in these speculative refinements and cannot appreciate them. But his public does expect the diviner to be tense and excited, and is visibly impressed by his excursions into drama. In either case, we may conclude, the diviner's role offers a congenial niche to individuals of that religious bias or, more generally, of that temperament and intellectual predisposition.

5. THE MECHANICS OF HATI

Although we are not at the moment concerned with the influence of Islam on Nupe religion, it is convenient to discuss the Mohammedan variant of divination in this context. For in the main it is only the technique which is novel in this system of divining, while its topics, interpretation, and social aspects coincide with those typical of the pagan system. Partly, too, the two techniques share various points of resemblance, such as the designs of the 'key' figures or the use of series of eight, so that it would seem that the new, Mohammedan, practice has been assimilated to the older, indigenous method.

Hati or sand divination is even more fully a learned skill than

3: Forde E-4 (no date) 1955 FF52 Nupe FF52

either with or without specified actions and utterances. Their avowed purposes are frequently therapeutic, but also include defences against theft, witchcraft, and devices to render one invisible. Nupe leech-lore includes both rational empirical cures and mystical rites which can produce no result beyond increasing the confidence of the user. Nor is there any distinction in Nupe vocabulary, for the term *cigbe* is used for all medicines. Medicines may be distinguished as those which are practically effective or may be easily taken as being effective by practitioners, and those whose objective irrationality cannot be mistaken. The latter class may include devices for rendering a man invisible, medicines for killing thieves and fending off witchcraft, and for making hoes do their work in half the normal time.

There are four main types of practitioners of medicine: the guild of Moslem barber-doctors, the pagan order of *cigbeciɨi*, and two kinds of individual practitioners.

The barber-doctors' guild is recognized by the *Etsu* Nupe but is confined almost entirely to the towns. The guild head occupies an important position at court. They are entirely concerned with therapeutic medicines, but are regarded with contempt in the country districts where people feel that a barber cannot know about such things.

The *cigbeciɨi*, formerly recognized by the *Etsu*, but since replaced by the barber-doctors, are much more loosely organized than the guild. Whereas the latter keep their knowledge mainly within their lineages, the *cigbeciɨi* crafts can be bought by anyone. There is little corporate activity beyond occasional gatherings at the local head's house to discuss practice. The head is traditionally responsible for all new medicines. Offerings are made to the spirits of the order and through them to *Sokó*, the ultimate source of *cigbe*, whenever a new medicine is discovered. The names of spirits may also be introduced in the application of medicines, but there appears to be no invocation. With this mystical approach there is a greater sense of the implications of "medicine" for good and for evil. While Moslem barbers, though not concerned with the more "dangerous" medicines, sell without scruple medicines for immoral purposes, such as those to induce barrenness in women, *cigbeciɨi* claim to be very particular as to whom they sell the more powerful *cigbe*. The powers of witchcraft are often said to require medicines, while the conflict between witchcraft and anti-witchcraft is sometimes represented as a struggle between good and bad *cigbe*.

Individual practitioners are of two kinds: those who provide cures for petty ailments, and Moslem mallams and scholars who write a passage from the Koran which is washed off and drunk by the patient. They also provide amulets containing Koran texts, as elsewhere in Islamic West Africa.

Some medicines, the ingredients of which are not known, belong to descent groups and are kept in vessels into which libations of beer and offerings of blood are poured to the ancestors.

The neophyte to the order of witches as imagined by the Nupe must, it is believed, bathe himself in certain medicines and observe certain taboos, and the masked dancer who impersonates and is possessed by the spirit of the anti-witchcraft society[10] uses certain medicines while others are placed on the mask to give it and its dancer their unique character. There are in addition individual medicines used as defences against magic, and ordeal medicines which will kill the witch who drinks, but leave the innocent unharmed.

Divination[11]

Divination plays an important part in Nupe life and is used not only to determine the rites to be performed in particular situations but to decide such matters as the election of a high officer of state. The two methods used are the old system,

[10] See below.
[11] Nadel, 1942, p. 379; 1954a, pp. 36–67.